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THE FAIRY MARAUDERS!*

BY J. F. GOOKINS.

O, here I declare is
A short tale of fairies,
Who foun't for the Fairy King's kitchen!
One day as marauders,
By Oberon's orders
They went out his Great Feast to richen.

High up on a daisy,
They found a Bee, lazy,
And my! how they screamed as they downed him!
"Hooray Minnesinger!
We'll have out your stinger!"
And "He's got our honey, confound him!"

But O! what a shame 't
Was though you can't blame it,—
Poor Bee was so scared—that he cried out:
Where way up in branches
The Humming-bird's ranche is,
Two WONDERFUL EGGS he had spied out!

Then high was the heart of
And swift was the start of
These three little bad Elfin bummerns,
And ah! though the flustered
Poor tiny bird blustered,
They hoorayed for "CUSTARD!"
And ravished the House of the Hummers.

Sad, sad is my story,
But all hunkidory
The Moppets went home with their plunder;
In acorn bowls beaten
The eggs were and eaten,
And that is the end of this wonder.

*See illustration on third page.

DIFFENBACH'S PICTURES.

THERE are pictures, like some sweet faces, that suggest a beauty which it is easy to detect, but difficult to define. As the soul,—speaking through the features, and uttering a language as delicate, yet as significant as that the flower breathes forth in its perfume,—discloses the pure fragrance of the character; so the true artist, expressing through the real and tangible, the ideal and *spirituel*; breathes into his picture that soul of beauty which animates the canvas with the sweet suggestion of a something he fain would realize but cannot body forth in material shape. For there is as much an expression of pictures as of faces; and some paintings command the eye by as potent a spell as that felt when a great soul leans the full weight of its glance upon our face.

Those pictures are made most for man, into which the most of man has gone in the making. We love to feel the presence of the artist in his work; and—just as we are thrilled more by the magnetic presence, and soulful eye of the orator, than by any word he may utter, are we drawn closer to the picture by that secret sympathy which springs forth like an electric spark from the shock of pleasure, caused by the sudden surprise of having found the artist in it.

That only is immortal into which man has put a portion of his immortality. And this perhaps is the reason we admire most, and linger longest before a figure painting; for man is greater than nature, and a landscape can never be made to express the soul's passion or aspiration. Perhaps, too, it is this that explains why, whenever we stroll

through the Opera House Art Gallery we feel irresistibly—almost consciously—drawn toward Diffenbach's great masterpiece, "The Christmas Tree;" and pause to study again and again its familiar and favorite story-telling groups. And as what has been said furnishes a most appropriate peg, we cannot resist the desire that tempts us to hang thereon a few remarks—though they be threadbare—regarding the works by which Diffenbach is represented in our gallery.

There are two Diffenbach's—"The Christmas Tree" and "The Visit to the Old Nurse,"—in the gallery; and like light and shade, they contrast in such a way as to help display each the other's beauty. In the one, the ruddy glow which warms the wide beam-studded room—suggesting a roaring, wintry wind without,—only helps us the better to realize that breezy, sunny atmosphere which fills the other, and wafts from the blossoming trees the fragrance which seems almost to steal forth from the picture. In "The Christmas Tree," all is hilarity and loud-mouthed mirth; while in "The Visit to the Old Nurse" is embodied that profound and inexpressible feeling which makes tears of tenderness gather in the eye, even while the smiling lips seem all the while saddening into that deeper joy of perfect peace.

Contrast the humorous sweetness of the one with the joyous tenderness of the other, and study in "The Christmas Tree," that drove of domestics in the background—their uncouth figures softened into grace by the dim light, through which shine their vacant faces, lit up by that awkward expression of conscious happiness peculiar to stolidness. Then turn and study in "The Visit to the Old Nurse," the old folks—"grandma" and "grandpa,"—whose cheerful faces shine from the canvas with a tender sweetness like that which the setting sun throws across a hazy September landscape. Their joy is not boisterous, neither is their mirth loud; but though the warmth of feeling which glows in their hearts is not a noontide heat, yet it is felt like an Indian summer that gathers up the sunshine of the year in its few brimming days, and empties it through the hushed air in peaceful plenty.

Or,—for another contrast, turn again to "The Christmas Tree" and see that chuckling child, trustful in the strong arm of the stalwart nurse, who, in a perfect abandon of turbulent joy, tosses carelessly aloft her crowing charge;—and then study in the other picture the expression on the face of the infant, whose intense earnestness of purpose, pouted lips, and bright eyes, tell surely of the dewy kiss that's quick to come and dissolve upon the face of its companion, "like a nose-gay that bursts its strings with weight of roses over blown!"

But the central thought—the artist's ideal—in both pictures is best told by the groups in the foregrounds. That one in "The Christmas Tree," where the poor emaciated beggar is being bountifully provided with a Christmas feast by a happy group of givers, upon whose upturned faces—which are speaking commentaries on the beautiful text, "it is more blessed to give than to receive"—like

a benediction after prayer, falls with a radiant burst, a halo of soft light;—and then that other group in "The Visit to the Old Nurse," wherein the old nurse, seated, with her sturdy, sun-browned boy standing in her lap—is the very embodiment of proud, self-abnegating motherhood; while the richly-draped figure of the more shapely and elegant woman who stands holding out her chubby, white-armed, sweet-faced child to receive the shy kiss of its foster brother, reveals that other type of motherhood, which, though less demonstrative, is equally proud and unselfish;—these are the great thoughts of the artist, and reveal his sympathetic nature.

The man who can paint such sweet babies, and jolly, good-natured old people, must have a heart brimming with love. While his infants are as lovely as blossoms, his old folks are as savory and sweet as the ripe fruit. Their wrinkles are not the ruts of age, but are those sun ripples made when some breeze of experience ruffled the calm sea of their life. It is the expression of love and tenderness in his pictures, that is the characteristic of Diffenbach's style; and it is this which cannot fail to ultimately win for him the admiration and favor of all those who appreciate the beautiful in art expressed through the feeling and sentiments which are suggested by humor and goodness.

[Since the above was in type, "The Visit to the Old Nurse" has been returned to New York, where, we are informed, it has found a purchaser.]

AMERICAN ART NEWS.

CHICAGO.

The past winter has been the most active in matters of art interest, thus far, in the history of our city,—old in all that appertains to commercial growth and material prosperity, and young alike in years, and literary and æsthetic attainments.

Receptions, private views, and exhibitions of various sorts have followed each other in rapid succession. We can look back with pleasure upon the work accomplished within a twelve months past, noting alike better things from the easels of our professionals and a correspondingly increased appreciation by the public. Good taste has developed as good pictures have multiplied. The gratifying retrospect, combined with many outcroppings of progress that include larger aims for still greater achievements, incline us to hope much for the coming year, and more for those that will follow.

THE Chicago Etching Club is a recently organized association, composed of artists whose prime object is improvement in original designing. H. Beard is president, and L. C. East secretary. It is, in part, a rejuvenation of the Sketching Club of last season, but upon a broader and more comprehensive basis, including many of the members of the body mentioned, with the addition of others. Specimens thus far produced are more than satisfactory, in a large number of instances, and if unity of purpose and effort can be maintained, the club will be able to present to the art public a portfolio that will compare favorably with the work of other similar bodies. For the specific, no less than for the general good which may result from its continued efforts, we heartily wish it abundant success.

Mr. Leo W. Volk, our well known sculptor, has but just finished the four *basso-reliefs* for the granite pedestal of the Cook County Soldiers' Monument, and has sent them to Philadelphia, where they are to be cast in standard bronze. They represent, respectively, the four branches of the service,—infantry, cavalry, artillery and marine. The statue of the soldier which is to stand upon the pedestal is nearly completed, in marble, and the entire monument will be ready for removal to its permanent location, at the Rosehill Cemetery, by the first of May.

The next work of importance which will engage the attention of Mr. Volk will be a bust of the late Henry Keep, for which he will make the cast from a portrait by Elliott. Mr. Volk will also make casts for statues of the widow and daughter of Mr. Keep; these, with the